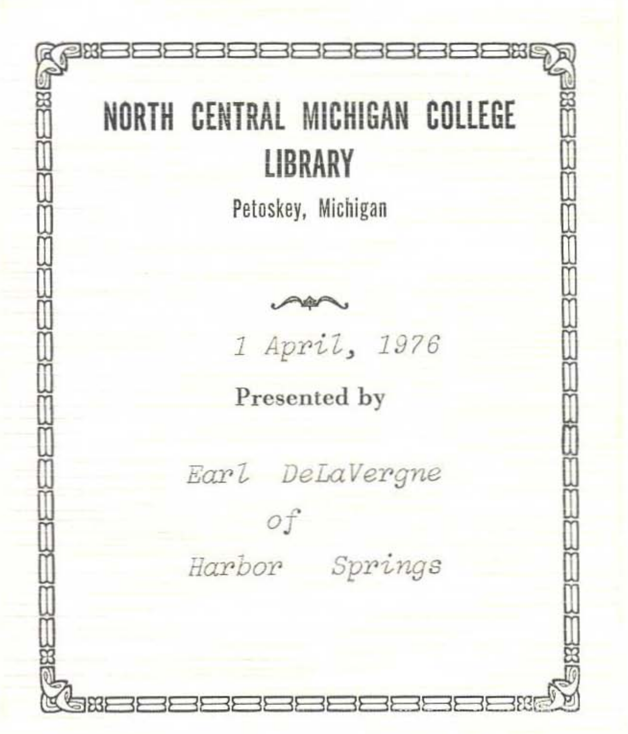
L' ARBRE CROCHE MISSION

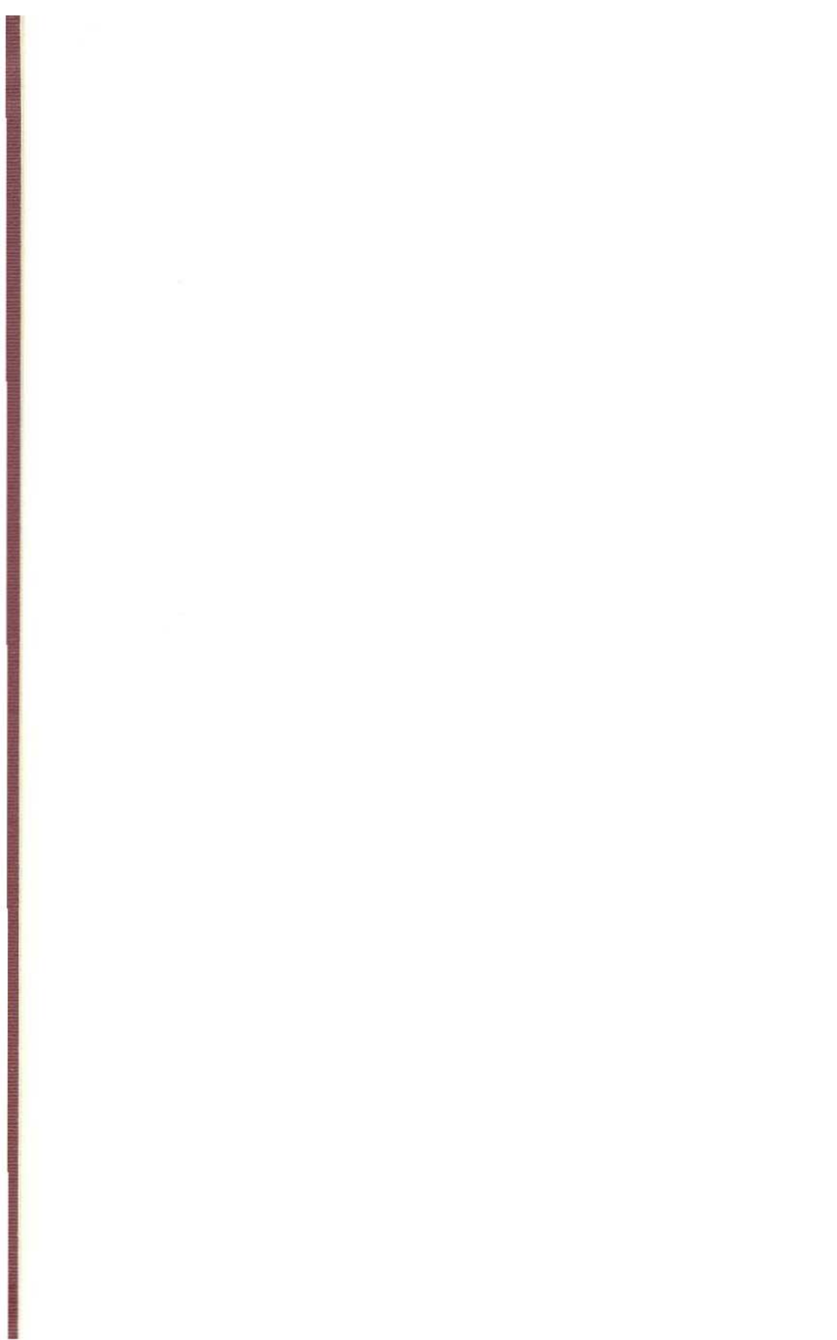
by

H. Bedford-Jones





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L'ARBRE CROCHE MISSION

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A Memorable Relation
Briefly Setting Forth The
Historical Facts
And Eschewing All Fable &
Legend, As Erected By
Untutored Minds,
Touching Upon The Justly
Famed Mission Of
The Crooked Tree

By H. BEDFORD-JONES, Esquire



Printed By The Same At The
Sign of The Crossed Quills
In Sta. Barbara

1917

Forty copies, hand-printed by the Author, & distributed privately.

Inscribed to him whose comprehensive knowledge of the old northwest meets with more recognition abroad than at home; my friend

HENRY McCONNELL

PREFACE

The material contained herein has been compiled from original sources by one Henry McConnell, who can truly say of northern Michigan annals, "Magna pars fui."

This volume is not controversial. Its intent is to give concisely the actual story of a famous mission. A great deal of trash has been written about l'Arbre Croche by lazy or honestly ignorant dabblers; and this book is not copyrighted in hope that others may find profitable instruction therein.

H. Bedford-Jones

Santa Barbara, Calif.

God made a little crooked tree
    And set it on the shore,
A thing of wondrous sanctity
To paynim folk. But presently
Came men who hailed the mystery
And preached a faith of charity
    All up and down the shore.

They built a church upon the shore
    Beneath the crooked tree,
And taught the paynim to abhor
The gods by which his fathers swore;
It proved a simple labor, for
The Cross they gathered to adore
    Was but a Crooked Tree!




L'ARBRE CROCHE MISSION

By

H. Bedford-Jones & H. McConnell,
Members Michigan & Wisconsin
Hist. Societies, Etc.



L' Arbre Croche, the crooked tree, was a prominent landmark of early voyageurs on Lake Michigan; the hooked top of the great pine was visible for miles. It occupied a point near what is now Middle Village, between Little Traverse and Waugoshance, its Indian name being War-gun-uk-ke-zee, or the bent tree. It was sacred.

The tree was in place until the early years

of the last century, when certain bickering red men cut it down. With the fall of this the symbol of their greatness and life-pulse, they too fell; and the mould of l'arbre croche lined their graves.

After all, often we find that God has a purpose in altering the natural shapes of men and things. Sometimes He speaks thru such a man or thing --- perhaps a burning bush. The High Cross was but a crooked tree.

✠

In 1740 the Ottawas about Fort Michillimackinac were dissatisfied with their unproductive lands, and they sent forth parties to seek new fields. This alarmed the French, fiercely struggling to retain their fur trade.

De Blainville, second in command at the post, spent that winter with the Ottawas and fetched them back in the spring. Commandant de Celeron took the chiefs to Quebec to hold a council with the Marquis de Beauharnois.

The Governor submits new locations, offers to light a fire at the spot chosen, and promises

his friendship and a great flag of France. In the following summer we find the chiefs back in Montreal with word that they had settled at l'Arbre Croche. "May your hearts," says Beauharnois, "be as white as the great flag I have caused to be hoisted in your village!" Thus it is settled.

✠

Meantime the old Jesuit mission of Saint Ignace de Michillimackinac, holding the bones of Marquette, had been abandoned and burned. Above the signature of de Lignery I find what others have missed --- that he moved the post in 1720 to what is now Old Mackinaw. The mission followed; thence with the Ottawas and Jesuits to l'Arbre Croche in 1741.

An Oft Mooted Date Now Settled

Henry locates l'Arbre Croche twenty miles west of the fort. Puthoff's census of 1819 gives it as ten towns with a population of 1500. In the first gazeteer of Michigan it is placed ten miles southwest of Mackinaw. Farmer's map of 1846 places it at Harbor Springs. Andrews, in

1853, puts it twenty-five miles southwest of Mackinaw. Where was l'Arbre Croche? Puzzling as these varied locations have been to historians, it will be shown that all were correct.

Beauharnois kept faith with the red settlers, sending the French from Mackinaw to aid them. By degrees the entire shore-line down to Little Traverse Bay was cleared for tillage and dotted with villages. The whole was blanketed under the generic term of l'Arbre Croche.

In 1742 came Joseph Ainse, "a master carpenter." He built a church near the principal village and by the crooked tree, where Cross Village now is. Here the abstract became the concrete name, and here was located "Le Registre de Nouveau Mackinac." [1]

✠

The mission, its farms and lands, was the nucleus and center of all. Neither seats nor floor had the log church; since it did not last so very long, perhaps it was not well builded. The French Jesuits were so eager to save souls that they neglected to glorify God, in the sense

1 Rezek, Vol. II p. 115

of building greatly as did their brethren in the Californias. Further, Master Ainse was newly wedded, and the first person to be buried in the new church was his child. Therefore let us love him for his shortcomings!

Beneath the kindly French rule our Ottawas increased and multiplied; their lands were rich and they prospered. Pere du Jaunay was among them.

✠

Historians Are Found In Error

From a letter written by de la Richardie at Detroit in 1741, addressed to du Jaunay at the "river Iouchetanon," it has been supposed that du Jaunay was then in Indiana, this address being mistaken for a variant of Ouiatanon. The statement of Thwaite and others that du Jaunay was appointed to l'Arbre Croche in 1744, is entirely wrong.

Iouchetanon is the Ottawa term for Grand River, is rightly spelled, and means "far-flung water. Thus Pere du Jaunay was wintering with his Ottawas at Grand River, as was customary.

Du Jaunay came to Michillimackinac in 1735 and remained thirty years. In '66 he was in charge of Pointe aux Trembles, Quebec, dying there in '81. Some writers call him "Pierre Luc"; his signature is always "P. du Jaunay".

✠

His letters from l'Arbre Croche are deeply interesting, balanced between devotion to, and sadness over, his work. He was the life and soul of the crooked tree; yet ever he saw his flock bedeviled by traders, voyageurs, soldiers. Nor might he settle down to quiet days and softly chiming hours.

When the "old fort" fell in '63, it was du Jaunay who influenced the Ottawas to save the hapless Englishmen; it was he who carried word of their plight to leaguered Detroit and returned with Gladwin's orders, pleading peace upon Pontiac en route. Afterward, he writes Langlade of how his converts had secured rum and had made him suffer in body and spirit.

Assisting du Jaunay at various times were Coquart, who came west with Verendrye and

died at the Saguenay mission in '65; Morinie, who stayed twelve years; and le Franc, who stayed nine. Du Jaunay mentions a "dear brother Nicolas Demers" of whom we know naught.

Through all the flaming years the central figure is that of du Jaunay. He it was whom the Indians revered, whose name they cherished and whose paths and walks they pointed out to their children. After his going the crooked tree bare no good fruit.

✠

L'Arbre Croche mission was abandoned beneath British rule. The registers, particularly that of baptisms, tell the result: "child of a savage woman", "father wintering on Grand river", "natural son of ---" and so forth.

Their Fame Goeth Out Abroad

Yet these Ottawas of l'Arbre Croche were men among men. They were with Denonville and signed peace with the Iroquois in 1701; they followed Langlade to Fort Du Quesne and slew Braddock's men; they were at the Plains of Abraham and the subsequent battles, afterward signing a

treaty with Sir Wm. Johnson at Detroit.

They were with Burgoyne in New York, and with Hamilton, unjustly termed "the hair-buyer"; they were at the assault on St. Louis; they aided Roberts in capturing Mackinaw, and McDouall in repelling the Americans; they assisted at the capture of Prairie du Chien, and helped burn Buffalo. Also they ate their dead enemies, as Tanner recounts.

✠

In 1799 Gabriel Richard stopped at l'Arbre Croche, finding just one baptised Ottawa out of thirteen hundred. In vain had they petitioned the English for a priest, even subscribing 2398 francs annually for his support. Being denied, they drifted back to paganism.

Richard found l'Arbre Croche to be now five miles south of the old site. La Mission was marked only by a great oaken cross high on the bluff. The crooked tree was forgotten of men.

God, however, does not forget. Over the desolate l'Arbre Croche, tenanted by pagans,

lost in the rising importance of other places, still hovered the shadow of a cross.

✠

The years waxed and waned. It was 1821 when Pere Richard revisited l'Arbre Croche; he found even the Indian agent a whiskey-trader.

But, two years later, eight Ottawa chiefs petitioned Congress for missionaries; and Chief Magati-Pinsigo sent a further plea. Both were ignored. From careless perusal of this petition sprang the astounding assertion that Marquette founded l'Arbre Croche.

After The Fallow Years

In 1825 Fr. F. V. Badin visited the missions, and hearing of his approach, the Ottawas of the crooked tree erected a log chapel at Seven-mile Point. It was consecrated July 29th, and dedicated to Saint Vincent de Paul. Badin twice returned, and inspired two ladies of Mackinaw to become teachers. Richard was now in Washington, and shamed the government into compliance. Word spread abroad that the crooked tree was about to bud forth.

Assaquinac, the Drummond's Island interpreter, heard the word. Renouncing his English pension and post, he hurried to l'Arbre Croche, and remained as teacher. Hymnals and prayer books in the Ottawa tongue were brought from Montreal. When, in 1827, Jean Dejean came from the Huron as the first stationary priest, he found a hundred and fifty Christians.

✠

Now the old tree budded anew. A town, church, village, school and manse were built; not at the old site, but where now is Harbor Springs. A temperance society was formed --- the first in America, by the way. Joseph Latourno taught the French tongue and manners. Dejean compiled and printed a new prayer book for his six hundred converts.

The First Temperance Society

L'Arbre Croche was at this time in the diocese of Cincinnati. In 1829 arrived Bishop Fenwick, and took back with him Augustin Hamelin and William Blackbird, who studied under Fenwick and even went on to Rome. They did

not attain the priesthood, Hamelin returning to his tribe and Blackbird dying in Rome. The silly assertion is still heard that Blackbird was murdered because he opposed the sale of Indian lands!

Dejean went his way, and in 1831 came one whose star was to shine high in the after years --- Frederick Baraga the Austrian.

✠

Baraga was both student and explorer, and the greatest missionary of his place and time. From the start he made l'Arbre Croche a center of zealous activity.

Early in 1832 he carried the work on to Beaver Island, then dedicated a church at Indian Lake, Manistique. This last site is now a summer resort; the cemetery was fenced and preserved by Ossawinamakee, son of the former chief. Returning to the islands, Baraga found a chapel erected and a collection of "idolatrous articles" for burning.

In June he founded the Cheboygan mission --- not at the present town of that name,

however. This mission was at an Indian town a day and a half by water from l'Arbre Croche, and was later served from Little Traverse; showing indisputably that this was the Burt Lake village, none whatever existing at Cheboygan.

In August came Fenwick with a code of civil laws --- a final gift, for this was the year of cholera, and a few weeks later he was dead.

✠

Baraga went to Detroit and there printed his Ottawa prayer book and catechism; an improvement on Dejean's work, which had held too many Algonquin words. Returning, he had a snowbound and unhappy winter.

Then came his last months here. In June he went to the old site, 21 miles north. A log church was built and, because the St. Ignace mission had been carried hither, dedicated by the same name. On the bluffs the great cross, renewed in 1832, produced Ville la Croix as place-name; the Cross Village of today.

Baraga moved his Beaver Island converts to the mainland, re-founded the mission on Grand

River, and made a final tour. Then he went north to his larger work and his bishopric.

Came Father Saenderl, but left slight record, save that l'Arbre Croche came within the new diocese of Detroit. He was relieved in the fall of 1835 by Francis Pierz, a Pole.

✠

Pierz has been termed the father of agricultural colleges. He flung himself into the task of making a farming community, built a sawmill, taught the Indians how to use the soil. For seventeen years he worked, Fr. Mrak aiding him. But they could not prevail against the changing times; their schools and inoculations were not proof against the inrushing settlers. Before the ringing axes fled the last memory of blackrobe and voyageur. Mackinaw, where the annual pensions were paid, was a hellhole. White fishermen reaped the lake harvest.

The Beginning Of The End

Place-names altered. Ile aux Galets became Skilagalee; Waugoshance, Wobbleshanks; and in place of l'Arbre Croche was Little Traverse. So

passed for ever the old mission's name.

Docks for "shipping-wood" lined the lake shores and presaged the lumbering era. James Jesse Strang seized the Beavers and established a Mormon kingdom --- destined to a future of blood and tears. Smallpox stalked through the land, ravaging.

Because of these things, with a decrease in the pensions, our Ottawas gradually drifted off into the northwest --- not by wholesale, but in a steady trickle of emigration. Still, in after years there was no lack of l'Arbre Croche men to slay and be slain on southern battlefields.

✠

John Bernard Weikamp, a superior of the Franciscan order, was involved in serious trouble with Bishop O'Regan of Chicago. He came north. Baraga, now bishop in charge of the missions, recognized the man's value and gave him harborage.

Weikamp arrived in Cross Village Nov. 25, 1855, followed three days later by Baraga, who remained over Christmas and gave minor orders

to two of Weikamp's novitiates.

Thus was the new foundation established; not without the fold of mother church, as is often affirmed, but with due sanction and authority both then and later.

✠

Weikamp was well able to discover and to graft the shards of the ancient tree. By 1858 he had centralized the other missions upon his Cross Village convent; he had four brethren and twelve sisters at work; and in June Baraga consecrated the church and cemetery.

A curious structure, this! In the center, the square church, and on either side of it, built around patios but forming one continuous block, the convent of a hundred bedrooms. It was not only dormitory, but held schoolrooms, shops, refectories, etc. South of the convent was a small building with a four-sided, pointed roof. A trap in its floor gave upon a vault, designed to hold the body of the superior.

Even now men defame the dead with tales of hidden wealth and immorality --- all untrue.

Weikamp had shrewdly secured enough acreage to support his work, but was not laying up for himself any treasure upon earth.

The brethren and sisters lived entirely separate lives, not being allowed so much as to speak each with the other. They had given up the world; and therefore the world, after its fashion, was not slow to vilify them.

During these years Protestant missions were numerous but accomplished little of moment.

✠

Slowly the long years passed and changes came upon the northland. The mission station of Agaming became a thriving town and was named Petoskey, after one of the local Ottawa sub-chiefs. The lumbering industry waxed huge and the railroad came, and men grew rich in despoiling the redskins with liquor. Weikamp found that with the years Cross Village drew farther from the world; it was off the advancing course of traffic and trade, and with the altering roads became difficult of access.

So it came to pass that in his latter years

Pere Weikamp spent much time in his crypt, smoking and meditating. His work had succeeded; but the red men were vanishing, and the day of missions had given way to that of parishes.

✠

The Last Phase

On March 19, 1889, Weikamp died from injuries received in a runaway accident. The foundation did not long survive him. It was controlled by a stock company and supported by the farm; but was finally abandoned in '96, the sisters retiring to Joliet, Illinois. Ten years later, what remained of the buildings was struck by lightning and destroyed.

Thus perished the last stock of the famed crooked tree, probably nevermore to be revived. L'Arbre Croche was but a backwash from the great flood of history; its story is one of petty and local endeavors, of continued successes, of repeated failures whereof the causes were the fault of no man. Its picturesque features have made appeal to "artistic temperaments" and the

same credulous souls who go into raptures over Alexander Henry's mythical friend Wawatam, and who erect marbles to petty local redskins, neglecting the red patriots who died in southern prison-camps or battles.

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The hitherto unwritten story of the crooked tree is replete with sweet touches, and is filled with the high spirit of men who worked and suffered in the service of God.

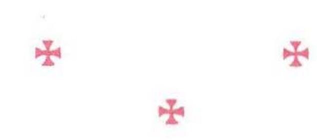
This booklet cannot pretend to set forth all such things --- the letters of beloved Pere du Jaunay, the reception of Bishop Fenwick, the pathetic or heroic incidents innumerable. It can give but the sketchily outlined relation of a mission whereof the very name is now no more than a memory.

A failure? Far from it. The registers of l'Arbre Croche tell of splendid success; not as the world names it --- but what matters the world's esteem?

Within this curt outline, then, lies a significance which each of us must seek for him-

self; an inspiration which can discover itself only to those whose hearts will allow entrance.

And at l'Arbre Croche a half-witted lay brother keeps the burial crypt of Weikamp and the crooked tree.



L'ENVOI

So ends the tale of how men lived and died
  And how all ruined is the crooked tree;
Yet from the ancient cliffs a Tree holds wide
  Its arms unto the sunset's memory.

And we who watch across the vagrant years
  Where death makes mimicry of hope --- shall we
Not find somewhere within the blood and tears
  Of men who served their God, a mystery?

Men pass; their tombs decay, their kingdoms wane,
  Their olden fanes fall crumbling to the sea;
Yet though lost things come never back again
  A Tree holds faith in immortality!

Here Ends

The Story Of
L' ARBRE CROCHE MISSION

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at

The Sign Of The Crossed Quills

Santa Barbara

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